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LETTER
FROM A
BLACKSMITH,
TO THE
MINISTERS AND ELDERS
OF THE
Church of Scotland.

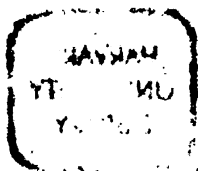
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A
LETTER
FROM A
BLACKSMITH
TO THE
MINISTERS AND ELDERS
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

IN WHICH THE MANNER OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN
THAT CHURCH IS CONSIDERED; ITS IN-
CONVENIENCIES AND DEFECTS
POINTED OUT, AND METHODS
FOR REMOVING THEM
HUMBLY PROPOSED.

*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty
to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and
thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.—Eccl. v. 2.*

*I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the un-
derstanding also.—1. Cor. xiv. 15.*

FROM A LONDON EDITION.

BOSTON.[^]

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Cornhill Square, No. 79. Washington Street.

Advertisement.

If, in the following sheets, the reader finds the Blacksmith now and then introducing scraps of Latin, he will be the less surprized if he reflects, that in Scotland most of the mechanics have a smattering of that Language, which is taught even in the country parish schools. It seems, the author thought it incumbent upon him, when he had to do with the clergy, to muster up all the little learning he was master of. With what propriety and judgment his quotations are introduced, is submitted to the reader, by his most obedient servant,
THE PUBLISHER.

AMERICAN EDITOR'S PREFACE.

This little book is written with such strength of argument in favor of a precomposed Liturgy, and at the same time with such genuine touches of humor, that the publisher of the present edition thinks it best to give the work to the public entire, in its original form. Though well adapted to the place and time in which it was written, it is pointed at many errors, which are not prevalent in our age and country. But, as the spirit of error and enthusiasm, though assuming different appearances, is ever much the same, the following sheets may afford pleasure and edification to the candid reader.

A

LETTER

TO THE

MINISTERS AND ELDERS OF THE CHURCH OF
SCOTLAND.



RIGHT REVEREND AND RIGHT HONORABLE,

I HAVE presumed to address you on a subject which appears to me of the greatest importance and worthy of the consideration of the ministers and elders of the Church of Scotland. Thank God, I have reason to hope, from your wisdom, learning and piety, that I shall be favored with a fair and patient hearing, though my sphere of life be low, and my sentiments set off with no other advantages than sincerity and truth, as far as I can distinguish it: for God, and my own heart, bear witness, that I present this address with no other view than to promote (as much as I can) the glory of God, the interests of true religion, and the honor, purity and peace of the Church of Scotland. Could I have found any better method of communicating my thoughts, than by a letter, I would willingly have chosen it; or had I hoped ever to have seen a more favourable season than the present, I would patiently have waited for it. But now we are

blessed with a learned body of clergy, with a prince well disposed to promote true piety among his people, and we have the happiness to live in an age, in which the prejudices of parties are mostly worn off, the rage of dispute abated, and men disposed to hear truth and obey reason; such peaceful, happy days are designed by Heaven, and ought to be employed by men, to repair in religion, what has been pulled down by mad passions, in turbulent times; to restore to its first beauty, whatever has been defaced by party prejudices in the days of contention; and to recover the purity of our faith, and decency of our worship, from the rust and low superstition which they have contracted in the ignorant ages, and tinctures of enthusiasm they imbibed in the shock and tumult of the reformation. There was no church that met with greater opposition, or was more violently agitated than ours; and though (thank God) it stood out the storm, yet it suffered very severely; and when the fury was in some degree abated, and men had time to look about them, our Church appeared little better than a ruin: her sacred buildings levelled with the ground, or bare, shattered walls, the standing monuments of religious madness; her treasures robbed by sacrilegious hands; her registers destroyed, or carried off; her funds applied to profane uses; and her clergy left to starve. Would to God she had suffered only in these less essential things.

But along with these, she contracted a singular and whimsical taste; her principles of faith grew dark and mysterious, and her method of worship defective and unreasonable.—

Some of these ruins she never can repair: some of them, indeed, time has in a great measure patched up; and some of them remain to be repaired by the present rulers of our church, or by succeeding generations. Of this kind is our public worship; in which there are several things that demand your serious attention, and call loudly for the diligence and learning of the present age. I will presume, with due deference, to point out a few of them; hoping that my poor endeavours may at least obtain pardon, out of respect to the importance of the subject and the sincerity of my intention, and that some able head and good heart will take the hint, and fully point out the flaws in our present way of worship, and direct us how to amend them. Some unprejudiced and happy genius may perhaps appear, whose persuasive eloquence, refined expression, and conclusive arguments, may command attention, and gain assent; in spite of the bigotry of the ignorant, the vain ambition of those that are fond of popularity, and the whimsical opinions of enthusiasts. Till such an one shall appear, I hope you will not take it amiss, that I offer my remarks; especially as I beg leave to assure you, that this my address does not proceed from a fondness of novelty, much less any intention to disturb the peace of the church established by law, or indeed from any other or any worse motive, than that her public service may be such as seems best calculated for promoting the interests of religion and virtue, and most suitable for reasonable creatures to offer, and an infinitely wise God to accept.

First, I submit to your serious consideration, whether a larger portion of the Scriptures should not be read every Lord's day in our public assemblies? The reading of the Scriptures always made a part of the public services in all the churches of God. The law and the prophets were solemnly read* in the synagogues every Sabbath day. Our Savior countenanced and sanctified this practice† with his presence and example. The apostle Paul peremptorily commands Timothy to give attendance to reading, as well as to exhortation and doctrine; and the primitive Church religiously observed this command, as Justin Martyr‡ bears witness. Upon the day that is called Sunday, (says he,) all that live in the country, or in the towns, assemble in one place; and the commentaries of the apostles, and the writings of the prophets are read, till the time allotted for them be expired." Nay more our own directory for public worship, (which perhaps may have more weight with some than the example of our Savior, the command of his apostles, or the practice of the purest antiquity,) recommends§ that ordinarily one chapter out of each Testament should be read at every meeting. I am at a loss whether to ascribe the negligence of this essential part of our service, to the pride of the clergy, or the perverseness of the people. Perhaps it may be in some degree owing to both. The clergy probably think that it would not give them a sufficient opportunity to display their own talents; and the people, that it does not so

* Acts xv. 23.

† Apol. 2d. p. 28. Tertul. ad. Gent. p. 47.

‡ Luke iv. 17.

§ 498.

fully please their ears, always itching with the desire of something new. To the first I shall only observe, that though we have, as we always ought to have, a very great respect for the observations and discourses of our spiritual guides; yet at the same time we cannot but wish to hear what the *Spirit saith unto the churches*, in his own words. We have room to wish for this, as we are told by the apostle, that the Scriptures are *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*; and that by them the man of God may be made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It is true; you indulge us now and then with ten or a dozen of verses of pure scripture in our public assemblies; but as we* have no regular plan of reading the Scriptures, of consequence we only hear detached places, chosen at the pleasure of the preacher, and applied to what purposes he thinks fit. This leaves our understandings too much in the power of the clergy, and exposes the simple and ignorant (who make the greater part of our congregations) to be seduced by the party principles and whimsical opinions of the preacher. It may at first sight appear, that the whole plan of our worship is as happily calculated for making a property of the laity, and keeping their judgments and consciences in the power of the parson, as any part of the popish system; for the minister needs not read any part of the Scriptures unless he pleases; he may choose what place

* Our directory declares, that it is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order: but our Parsons proceed in a very different method.

he thinks proper, may begin where he inclines, and break off when he has a mind; he may mangle them in any manner he thinks fit, and make them say whatever he would have them to say.

But allow me to tell you, that as the reading of the Scriptures in public assemblies, is of divine appointment, no power upon earth can dispense with the obligation. As they contain the articles of our faith, and the rules by which we are to regulate our lives, nothing can supply, and therefore nothing ought to usurp their place; and as all the reformed churches are agreed, that the Scriptures are plain in things necessary to salvation, we ought to hear them as they are, without your glosses and comments: Nay, what can be more effectual for our salvation, or so proper for instruction, seeing they bear witness for themselves, that *the word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and as a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart?** That it converts the soul and makes the simple wise.† Is there any thing that can be substituted in the place of the Scriptures, from which such great and happy effects may be expected? But if this shameful negligence be owing to the perverse humor of the people, who perhaps may think that the reading of the Scriptures is a dry insipid part of the service, you will not, I hope, take it ill, if I say, that amusements are more their errand to church, than instruction, and they are more desirous of new words than sound doctrine, and that in fact their hearts

* Heb. iv. 12.

† Psalm xix. 7.

are carnal, and estranged from the things of the Spirit; for the apostle informs us, that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him. Pardon me if I think that your compliance with this humour, is like Aaron's to the folly of the Israelites. As he sat up a calf made with his own hands, to be the object of the people's worship, instead of the living God; so you set up your own compositions, to direct the faith and regulate the manners of the people, in the place of the Scriptures of truth, dictated by the Holy Spirit. The service of God, in the way of his own appointment, ever was, and ever will be disliked by the bulk of the people. The Jews would willingly have embraced any religion but that which was given them from Heaven: they would have sacrificed in any place but in that pointed out by their Maker; and tho't no rites burthensome but those that God was pleased to appoint: but with respect to those, the prophet upbraids them with saying, as our people say, *Behold what a weariness is it !** It is the business and duty of ministers to check and resist this humour of the people, and not encourage it by a mean compliance with a vitiated taste, and a base betraying of the trust reposed in them: but alas! the taste of the people in this, coincides with the inclinations of the pastor, and flatters his pride and vanity too much to be restrained. However, with all humility I presume to beg, that you would be pleased to consider how you can answer to God, to your own consciences, and to us your hearers, for such a dangerous and wilful neglect.

* Malachi. i. 13.

As to Praise, we seem to study to give this part of our worship as much the air of rusticity, and contempt of God, as possible; because we thought that the engagement of the heart was (as indeed it is) the essence of this part of worship, we have whimsically thrown out every thing that helped to engage and elevate the heart. Many of the words we use are obsolete and low: the versification is mean and barbarous; and the music harsh and ill performed. Our harmony otherwise not very sweet, is entirely lost, and the sense broke off at every line. Our posture too, is the most indecent, negligent, and improper for singing well, that we could have contrived. It is true, the posture is of no importance, farther than as it expresses our reverence to the God whom we worship: yet it is as necessary that it should be decent, as that our words should be proper; for both are only signs of inward sensations. Should we find a fellow crying very bitterly, and dancing very briskly, these are signs of so opposite sensations, that we should be apt to imagine he was distracted: and what shall we conclude, when we hear a congregation addressing God in some ardent hymn or earnest petition, and see them sitting upon their breech, or lolling with the most negligent air and posture upon their seats? The signs here point to very different sensations! Quintillian seems to think, that there may be a solecism in gesture as well as in the expression; and if such a thing can be, we seem guilty of a very great one, in using the most indifferent, negligent posture, when we are employed in the most

interesting and serious affair ; I mean, offering praise to the living God.

I cannot help thinking, that all the rational people of our communion must be shocked with the indecencies, and follies, that attend the administration of our Lord's Supper, known among the common people, by the name of an *occasion*. We accuse the Roman Church of superstition, and that very justly ; but in this instance she may fairly retort, and tell us, that we blame in others what we approve of, or at least allow in ourselves ; for if our people did not imagine that there was some superior virtue, in sermons preached upon these *occasions*, some sanctity in the place, or some merit in their attendance, it is unlikely that such numbers, who have no intention to communicate, should crowd from all quarters, leave their parish churches almost empty, and slight, as good sermons, which they might hear without the fatigue of travelling, or the inconveniences that attend a crowd. Superstition in all countries has the same effect, though it may be directed to different objects : In Popish countries, people crowd from place to place to visit the shrines of the saints, and pray before the most famous images. In Scotland, they run from kirk to kirk, as it were, after the host, and flock to see a sacrament, as those to share in the procession ; and too many of our people (with shame we must confess) make the same use of our *occasions*, that the papists do of their pilgrimages and processions ; that is, to indulge themselves in drunkenness, lust, and idleness. Most of the servants, when they a-

gree to serve their masters in the western parts of the kingdom, make a special provision, that they shall have liberty to go to a certain numbers of fairs, or to an equal number of sacraments; and as they consider a sacrament or an *occasion* (as they call the administration of the Lord's Supper in a neighboring parish) in the same light in which they do a fair, so they behave at it much in the same manner. I defy Italy, in spite of all its superstition, to produce a scene better fitted to raise pity and regret in a religious, humane and understanding heart, or to afford an ampler field for ridicule, to the careless and profane, than what they call a field preaching upon one of those *occasions*. At the time of the administration of the Lord's Supper (ye know) that upon the Thursday, Saturday and Monday, we have preaching in the fields near the church, which it seems we must not use upon that occasion. I have often thought that the frequency of the sight makes it familiar, and consequently less shocking to you, or, that being in the inner circle, you seldom have access to see the indecency and absurdity of the whole scene; otherwise you would not encourage it. Allow me then to describe it, as it really is. At first you find a great number of men and women lying together upon the grass; here they are sleeping and snoring, some with their faces towards heaven, others with their faces turned downwards, or covered with their bonnets: there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making assignations to go home together in the evening, or to meet in some ale-house: in another place you see a pious circle sitting

round an ale-barrel, many of which stand ready upon carts, for the refreshment of the saints. The heat of the summer season, the fatigue of travelling, and the greatness of the crowd, naturally dispose them to drink; which inclines some of them to sleep, works up the enthusiasm of others, and contributes not a little to produce those miraculous conversions that sometimes happen at these *occasions*. In a word, in this *sacred* assembly there is an odd mixture of religion, sleep, drinking, courtship, and a confusion of sexes, ages and characters. When you get a little nearer the speaker, so-as to be within the reach of the sound, though not of the sense of the words, for that can only reach a small circle, even when the preacher is favored with a calm; and when there happens to be any wind stirring, hardly one sentence can be heard distinctly at any considerable distance. In this second circle you will find some weeping and others laughing, some pressing to get nearer the tent or tub in which the parson is sweating, bawling, jumping, and beating the desk; others fainting with the stifled heat, or wrestling to extricate themselves from the crowd; one seems very devout and serious, and the next moment is scolding and cursing his neighbor, for squeezing or treading on him; in an instant after his countenance is composed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, sighing, and weeping for his sins: in a word, there is such an absurd mixture of the serious and comic, that were we convened for any other purpose, than that of worshipping the God

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and Governor of nature, the scene would exceed all power of face.

But when one considers what solemn awe should accompany the pronounciation of his name, and what decent gravity attend his worship, and sees such an unhappy contrast, if his heart be not entirely unacquainted with the feelings of humanity, the sigh will force its way, and the pitying tear start into his eye ; especially if he knows that many of the clergy encourage this absurdity ; that this is the time when they vie with one another for popularity, and try who can convene the greatest mob ; that some of the elders are so fond of these religious farces, that they have threatened to abandon their churches, if the absurd practice of preaching without doors should be discontinued : and that even those of the clergy who have sense to perceive its inconveniencies, and ingenuity to own that it is wrong, yet want courage to oppose the popular frenzy, and resolution to reform what in their own hearts they cannot but condemn. Whether we consider this practice in a moral, political, or religious light, we shall find it attended with very bad consequences. How much must it encourage drunkenness, when such crowds are convened from all quarters ? What must the consequence be, when a whole country side is thrown loose, and young fellows and girls are going home together by night in the gayest season of the year, when every thing naturally inspires warm desires, and silence, secrecy and darkness naturally encourage them ? When I was a young fellow at my apprenticeship, I was a great frequenter of these occasions, and know them so well, that whatever others may

think, I would not choose a wife that had often frequented them, nor trust a daughter too much among those rambling saints. Old maids may perhaps be allowed to revenge themselves of the world, by growing religious at the easy rate of running from sacrament to sacrament; and they who are in pain to be provided with husbands, may possibly find their account in frequenting those *sacred* assemblies; but I would advise others to go but seldom, and never to a greater distance than that they can return before sunset; lest by frequenting them too much, they contract an idle disposition of mind, and by staying too late, they get into a *bad habit of body*.—Nor are the consequences of this practice, considered in a political light, more favorable than in a moral. Our church disclaims all holy days, and I should offend at once against truth and the rules of our church, if I said that we observed any such; but I presume that the number of our idle days will fall very little short of the number in the popish calender; and all the difference is, that their holy days are fixt, and our idle days moveable; theirs are dedicated to some saint, and ours are devoted to some *occasion*; theirs foster superstition and idleness, and so do ours; theirs are signalized now and then by miraculous cures, by which the patient's health is seldom bettered, and ours by miraculous conversions,* by which the converts' morals are rarely mended; and to do the papists justice, they deal more fairly in their miracles than we; for a man can see if a crooked limb be made straight, because it is

* See two volumes published at Glasgow, by Mr. Gillies.

the object of the senses; but a miracle wrought instantaneously in the mind must be taken upon the word of the patient or the parson; but the truth is, their holy days, and our idle days, whatever miracles they may produce, do hurt to true religion: the people lose many laboring days by them, and the country is deprived of the fruits of their industry. I have seen above three thousand people at one of these *occasions*. But supposing that one with another, there are only fifteen hundred, and that each of them, one with another, might earn 6d. a day. Every sacrament, by its three idle days, will cost the country much about 112*l.* 10*s.* sterling, not including the days that they who live at a great distance must lose in coming and going, nor the losses that the farmer must sustain, when *occasions* happen in the hay, harvest or seed times; the man of business, when they chance to fall upon market days; or the tradesman, when any particular piece of work is in hand that requires despatch. Now, supposing the sacrament should be administered only twice a year in all our churches, which, if it be not, it ought to be, these *occasions*, as they are managed at present, will cost Scotland at least 235,000*l.* sterling; an immense sum for sermons! the greater part of which might be saved, much disorder and irregularity prevented, would the assembly be graciously pleased to appoint some particular Sundays in the four seasons, for the administration of this sacrament over all the kingdom.* We were too

This was the method for several years about the time of the reformation.

fond of novelties, and perhaps too proud of our own judgments, when we altered established practices founded on reason, and approved by long experience: and we could hardly have pitched upon a more unnatural method than the present, consider it in what light you will; for if the design of this sacrament, next to setting forth the death of our Lord, be to remain as a pledge of love and charity among Christians, it does not with us at all seem to answer the design; as our congregations, like discontented children, take a private hour, as it were, and eat their bread by themselves in a corner; whereas all the rest of the Christian world do, Christian like, communicate together three times in the year; and as they show forth the same meritorious death, they show it forth at the same season, and, like brethren, sit down at once to the same love feast.

But beside this, the great noise that we make about these *occasions*, leads our people to lay too great a stress upon them, and to imagine that there is something meritorious, nay, that the life of religion lies in hearing a great number of sacramental sermons; they serve nearly the same ends in our church that confession and absolution do among the papists. Our people put on a very demure look, some days before the sacrament; the gloom gradually gathers upon their faces as it approaches, and they look like criminals going to execution when the day is come. Just so may it be seen in the popish countries, in the seasons set apart for confession and penance; but in both countries, the professed repentance proves only a flash of devotion, and, as if matters

were made up with the Deity, and all former accounts cleared, the papist soon puts off his penitential countenance, and the presbyterian lays by his sacramental face, and they and we, in a little time, are the same men that we were before.

And as these occasions make our people lay too great a stress upon the outward means, while they neglect the great end of all religion, I mean to better the heart, and reform the conduct; so they raise contentions, heart burnings, envy and factions among our clergy, while they contend for popularity, vie with one another who shall convene the greatest crowd, and work up the mob to the highest pitch of enthusiasm; and they often succeed so well, that they bring the weak and ignorant, to the very brink of downright madness. I have seen scenes of this nature that had much more of the fury of the bacchanalia, than the calm, serious, sincere devotion of a christian sacrament. It is here that the ministers display that false eloquence which catches the crowd, and consists in a *strong voice*, a *melancholy tone*, and *thundering out* at random, *damnation, death and hell*, fire and flames, devils, darkness and gnashing of teeth; and any one who has good lungs, and can borrow the beggar's cant, and the merry andrew's action, may become very popular, and make a great figure at an occasion; for the contention there, is not who shall reason most justly, deliver most gracefully, or direct their discourse in the best manner for bettering the heart and reforming the manners of the audience; but who shall appear most frantic, cry loudest,

speak with the deepest, *strangest* and most hollow tone; and be most *wrapt up in mystery* and scholastic terms. I have known these qualifications make nonsense triumph over sense, ignorance be preferred to learning; and incoherent, unintelligible, nay, contradictory rhapsodies, be received with admiration by the gazing crowd; while plain, learned and pious sermons, delivered with a becoming modesty and gravity, have been preached almost to the empty pews. Quintillian, assigning the reasons why the ignorant orators were heard with more applause by the mob, than the ingenious and learned, paints so justly the methods by which our ministers contend for popularity at the occasions, that the passage is worth transcribing. *Clamant ubique, et omnia levata (ut ipsi dicunt) manu emugiant, multo discursu, anhelitu, jactatione, gesta, motuque capitis furentes—mire ad pullatum circulum facit—cum ille eruditus modestus et esse, et videri malit—at illi hanc vim appellant, que est potius violentia.**

The art of managing mankind, (says Addison, speaking of quacks in physic) is only to make them stare a little, to keep up their astonishment, and to let nothing be familiar to them. This art is perfectly well understood by our parsons; for at these occasions, they try who shall make the people stare most; and

*Quintil. Inst. lib. ii. cap. 12. They always cry loud, and deliver all their discourse in a sort of extasy, with a hollow bellowing tone, a frantic action, deep sighs, furious gestures, violent tossing of their arms, and mad-like motions of their heads. It's wonderful what effect these things have upon the surrounding mob. A man of learning suits his pronunciation and action to his subject, chooses to be modest, and to appear so. They call this delivering their discourse with force, though it be rather with fury.

sometimes, they make them stare so long, and so eagerly, that the poor people turn almost *stark staring mad*: we are damned an hundred times over in one day, and damned too without any sort of discretion; for most of our ministers that I have had occasion to hear, seem to have embraced, and do certainly propagate Hoadley's notion of the sacrament of the supper; and yet they go on damning us still, when their master says, and they sometimes say, that the communion is little more than a mere ceremony. Poor laymen, I own, ought not to presume to dictate to the parson what notions he is to embrace and teach: but I humbly hope that we have a right to expect that the parson be consistent with himself, so far at least as not to damn us, where at other times he teaches us there is no danger.

But as it is not likely that these opportunities of speaking *great and swelling words** will be given up, while men are so *presumptuous and self-willed*; I submit to your consideration whether it would not be proper to pitch upon the place designed for the scene of the field-preaching, at least upon the communion Sunday, at a considerable distance from the church. This would draw off the mob: the contrast between the solemn action within doors and the comical scene without, would be less striking: the communicants would breathe a freer air; they would be less distracted in their devotions, have easier access to come up to the table, or to return to their seats; and the whole might be transacted with less bustle

* 2 Peter ii. 18.

and confusion, and with more decency and order. As it is managed at present, it is liker any thing than the administration of the supper of our Lord. Not a man among us would be content with a common meal served up in such confusion. I am sure that it is impossible for me, and I believe it is very difficult for any one, to carry up with him that sedateness of soul and calmness of thought, that I presume to think are necessary, when he approaches the table of the Lord. How should he? when he is forced to *wrestle through a crowd, to push and be pushed, stunned with a general hubbub, the seats rattling, the galleries sounding, the people singing, the communicants jostling one another in the crowded passages; some falling, others fainting, and in all corners of the church, hurry, confusion and noise.* I never see our tables* filled up, but it gives me an idea of *the distraction at Babel*, when the confusion of languages began to be felt. I submit it, whether the apostle's censure of the Corinthian church be not pertinent here; *This is not to eat the Lord's supper.*†

Perhaps the communicants should be left a little more to their own meditations; at least, for my own part, I could wish, that while the elements are handing about, there were observed (if it be possible) a solemn and universal silence; that we might have time for our private devotions, and an opportunity to ask a

* In the kirks in Scotland they have long tables, at which they sit and communicate: they will hold about a hundred or more; and when these remove to make room for others, there is the utmost confusion, as the kirk is crowded with spectators; and one part is struggling to get from the table, and the other wrestling to get to it.

† 2 Corin. ii. 20.

blessing of God, upon his word and ordinances ; especially, as it is either forbidden, or become unfashionable with us, to do so when we take our seats, or finish the service. These things I have mentioned, and I submit my thoughts to the wisdom and candor of the rulers of our church.

There still remains a very solemn and interesting part of our worship, I mean that of public Prayer, upon which I beg leave, with all submission, to make some few remarks ; earnestly entreating that they may be considered with calmness and impartiality by your reverences and the other members of our church ; and that though my sentiments should not please, yet in charity, you will believe that I wish well to the protestant cause, the interest of religion, and the purity and peace of the church of Scotland. These, I presume to think, would be greatly promoted, by the composition and establishment of some devout liturgy, or form of prayer, for public worship. Have patience, and hear me out. I was once as much prejudiced against a proposal of this nature, as you can be at present ; and if you will consider the inconveniences that attend our present way of worship, as calmly as I think I have done, you may perhaps see the necessity and advantages of a form of prayer as clearly as I do.

I beseech you then to reflect, that our present extemporary way of worship, is contrary to the practice and opinion of all mankind, in all ages, and of all religions ; until it was introduced amidst the ferment and confusion of the 15th century ; for before that time, whatev

er was the object of men's worship, whatever the matter of their prayers, or however widely they differed in the articles of their creed, yet they agreed as unanimously in the use of forms of prayer for their public worship, as they did in the belief of a God. Greeks and Romans, the Magi and the Mahometans, Jews and Christians, have all agreed in this practice. I have often heard our Mass John, honest man, urge the universal consent and opinion of mankind, against the Atheists, as a proof of the existence of a Deity. If this argument be conclusive, when applied to the first and greatest article of religion, I mean the existence of a God, sure it will be so too, with respect to the best and fittest way of worshipping him. But what is still more, God himself prescribed this way of worship to the Jews, as in the cases of murder, when the person who committed it was unknown; of suspicion of adultery; and when the first fruits were presented. His Son, our Saviour, honoured this way of worship with his presence; (for the worship of the synagogues was by a form of prayer;) he sanctified it by his practice; for in his agony in the garden, he arose up, awaked and rebuked the disciples, returned to the same place, repeated the same form of words three times over; and before he expired upon the cross, he offered up his devotions, in the words of the twenty-second Psalm. He authorized it by his command. For our directory for prayer informs us, that our Lord's prayer is not only a pattern for prayer, but is itself a most comprehensive prayer. So that, if the command of God himself, the example, prac-

tice and command of his Son, be sufficient to point out in what way he would be worshipped, a form of prayer is pointed out for that purpose : whereas it cannot be proved that ever God commanded extemporary public prayer ; that ever his Son attended worship performed in that way ; that he ever practised it, or ever commanded it ; nay, I am not certain that there is one example of extemporary public prayer in the Bible ; at least, I am sure there is not an instance that will correspond with our situation, or authorize us in the use of it, when so many and so great inconveniences do attend it.

We complain, and very justly too, that the popish clergy are too assuming ; and claim a superiority over the laity, inconsistent with the natural rights of mankind, and the relations of brethren formed by the covenant of grace. Pardon me, gentlemen, if I say that you claim a very extraordinary sovereignty over the laity in the case before us. Every one of you claims an exclusive privilege of manufacturing our public prayers, and assumes a right of making us say to the Deity, whatever he thinks fit. In the most momentous affair in which we can be concerned on earth, we must depend entirely upon the discretion, honesty and ability of every private parson, and take the words and matter of our addresses to our God and Maker, such as he is pleased to give ; without ever seeing, examining or judging for ourselves. This is really treating us as if we were children or fools. We allow that you have a right to offer our prayers ; and as it is not fit that we should all speak, the minister

may be called the mouth of the congregation; but the mouth of the congregation, should speak the mind of the congregation. In our congregations, the mouth runs before the mind, and speaks without giving us any opportunity of thinking that we ought to speak; and often says things that we should certainly reject; and sometimes offers petitions that we should absolutely abhor, had we time calmly to examine them. Our mouth leads us into the gross blunder of presenting our addresses to the Deity-first, and next judging whether they be proper addresses after they are offered, when we cannot mend what is wrong, or alter what is improper. We absurdly begin where we should end: for, in the natural order of things, the congregation should first be satisfied that the prayers are proper to be offered, and then the minister should offer them in their name: just as a prudent man would think before he speaks. But in our *admirable* plan of worship, the congregation speaks by its mouth, before it has considered what it has to say. That is, the parson offers up the petition, and the people may judge of its propriety after it is offered, if they please.

The absurdity here is so glaring, that it is astonishing that it escapes the observation of the laity; and it would not escape them in any other instance. Should the ablest member of the house of commons propose to offer an address to his majesty in the name of the house, without communicating it to the members, the impropriety would be immediately perceived. When the estates, or counties,

design to address their Sovereign, offer your service, and tell them, "Pray, gentlemen, give yourselves no trouble about the matter; we and our brethren will each of us address the king in our own way; trust the whole affair to us; every individual of the cloth is more than sufficient for the undertaking; it is your business to approve of whatever we are pleased to say for you; or at least, you may consider how you like the address after it has been offered." Take this advice, and try if the laity will be as complaisant with respect to the honor of their prince, and the concerns of their bodies, as they are with respect to the honor of their God, and the interests of their souls; yet one would be tempted to think (if the common consent of this nation were not against the opinion) that the laity are as much interested in an address to the Deity, as in one to the king; and that they would be at least as loth to trust the first, as the last, to the discretion, ability or honesty of every man who chanced to put on a black coat, or wear a starched band. But the grossest absurdities will be swallowed down when it is fashion; and I think there can hardly be a grosser one, than that a gentleman should mount the pulpit, of whose principles or discretion we have no knowledge at all, and that this man should have a right to dictate the prayers of the whole congregation. If we will believe the author of the *Characteristics*,* who seems to speak from experience, there are among you many whose principles are very dangerous, and very inconsistent with the religion of Jesus; yet these

* *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, published at Glasgow, 1756.

men not only lead, but even compose the devotions of the people, and make us poor laymen address our Maker upon any principles that they please.

I have come from my house a sound orthodox Christian, and have hardly taken my seat in the church, when I have found myself praying, or at least one was praying in my name, as a rank Socinian. I have been made an Arian, as to my prayers, very often; and in short, there has hardly any whimsical opinion been broached among the clergy for these forty years, that I have not some time or other found mixed with my public prayers, though, for my part, I am a plain old fashioned man, and content myself with the apostles' creed. Sometimes, indeed, for my heart, I could not have told upon what particular principles my prayers were offered: they were so *excellently well contrived, and so free from all narrow notions*, that they would have served a Jewish synagogue, a Mahometan mosque, or a congregation of Persian magi, as well, or better, than a Christian assembly. If the minister that officiates be a sceptic, I am made to pray like a sceptic: If an enthusiast, he addresses God in my name, according to his own enthusiastical notions: When he chances to be a factious firebrand, or a keen party-man, though I be a very peaceable tradesman, my prayers breathe faction, my devotions in public are flaming with party heat, and tinged with the fury of his faction. It is well known, that when any disputes happen, and differences arise among the clergy in their synods or assemblies, both sides appeal to Heaven in their public prayers, and force the

laity to appeal with them, (we are not supposed to have any right to judge for ourselves in these cases :) and what is even worse, by an unlucky change of ministers, or by stepping into another church, I have often been made to appeal to Heaven as an advocate for both sides of the question, and pray for and against each of the parties in one day: for though our churches have the appearance of the same worship, yet in fact their *worship* is as different as the tempers, principles, and parties of the parsons *who manufacture it*; and this leads the laity into the dangerous blunder of offering contradictory petitions, and praying at different times, upon principles as opposite from one another, as light is to darkness. It is not an unusual thing among us, to pray for and against presentations, in one week. I have thanked God for his decrees of election and reprobation in the forenoon; and in the afternoon, offered my humble thanks that all men have equal access to salvation by faith and virtue. In a word, there is no party, nor different principle among our clergy, with respect to which, I have not been made to play fast and loose with the Deity; to ask what I did not want, and to pray against what I most earnestly wished for. This we call worshipping God! but did we deal so with our fellow-men, they would call it mockery, and take it as a gross affront.—I cannot help thinking, gentlemen, that this will appear, even to yourselves, a hard treatment of the laity; and that you will acknowledge, that their judgment ought not to be so entirely made a property of, as to oblige them to have their public worship offered upon what princi-

ples the parson pleases to espouse ; or upon opposite principles, as the minister, for the time, is of this, or the other party. *One of your cloth complains that we betray a visible impatience till prayer be over.** Is it any wonder if we do ? For, as it is managed at present, prayer is to us a very dangerous part of worship : for as that judicious gentleman observes, *A great deal more, a vast deal more depends upon our performance of this duty with judgment and propriety, than most people seem to be aware of.*—They who are aware of this, cannot help being impatient and uneasy, when a duty of such vast importance, is trusted to every individual of the clergy : and they who seldom think of its nature or importance, will always esteem it as a dry and lifeless part of our service.

I am apt to think, that it is sometimes happy for our laity, that they only hear prayers as they do sermons, and cannot, I believe, as it is at present performed, or at least, I am sure do not, join in it. For though it be criminal not to worship God in public, yet it seems to be as great, if not a greater crime, to offer an irrational worship ; to insult him with contradictory petitions ; with ministers of opposite parties ; and to have our devotions tintured with the spirit of faction, the wild dreams of enthusiasts, the dangerous notions of sceptics, and the absurd follies of men whose heads are filled with vapours and whims. Though these should sometimes be mixed with your *discourses*, the hardship and danger would not be

* Mr. Fordice's Edification by public Institution.

half so great. If they did not instruct, they might amuse; and we needed not embrace your notions, unless we pleased; our own reason might resist, or some approved printed sermons might expel the poison. But when they are wrought into our *public prayers*, there remains no remedy; we must take these as you are pleased to give them, or go away without public worship.

The popish clergy, indeed, put a great hardship upon the laity, by offering their prayers in an unknown tongue: but though the hardship be great, it admits of some remedies. They may have their prayers translated into their respective languages; they may have them explained by those that understand the language; and constant use of the same forms, may in time enable them to annex proper ideas to the words. But the hardship put upon us, admits of no remedy: we must offer what prayers every clergyman pleases; we must understand them the best way we can; we must pick up the words as we can catch them, according to the strength of your voices, the distinctness of your pronunciation, and the largeness of the church: the fall of a bible, the opening of a seat, or a cough in any corner of the church, will lose us half a sentence. And yet, if we would pray with the understanding, we must collect the several parts of the sentence, supply the words that are lost, compare it with what went before, examine, approve, and offer it; and this must be all done in a breath. I question whether the parson could perform this task himself: and I am convinced that it is impossible for the slow and

ignorant part of the audience, especially as some of you speak so fast, that we cannot keep pace with you, barely in hearing what you say; others deliver so slowly, that our memories cannot serve us, to collect the several parts of the sentence; some are so fond of new and learned words, that one half of the congregation cannot know their meaning; and many of you have such a perplexed, intricate way of expressing yourselves, that we find it impossible to discover the import of your petitions; and perhaps should find this a difficult task, though we had an opportunity to consider them, at leisure in our closets.

So that, putting all these difficulties together, I imagine that it will appear, that the laity of the kirk of Scotland, lie under greater hardships, with respect to public worship, than the laity of any church upon earth. And this hardship is made still more galling, to those who have sense enough to feel it, by the pompous harrangues, that we are frequently entertained with, upon the privileges that we possess above other Christians, the religious liberty that we enjoy, and the singular purity of our worship. Sure, gentlemen, you must mean *yourselves*, when you ascribe these great blessings to our church, or you insult us in the most cruel manner. If you mean that *you* enjoy great privileges, and a most extensive liberty, it is very true: for you pray what you please, you sing what you please, you teach what you please, and your whole public worship is so much of your own manufacturing, that there can hardly be found room for a verse or two of scripture; and these you

choose as you please. In a word, every parish minister is a little pope, subject to none but a general council; and, like the great pope, not subject to that but when he pleases. For it seems to be a point as much disputed in the presbyterian church, whether a minister is obliged to submit to the sentence of a general assembly, as it is in the popish, whether his holiness ought to yield obedience to a general council. So that it must be acknowledged, that you enjoy very great privileges, and a most extensive liberty. But pray what privileges do we enjoy, when one man's judgment prescribes to a whole parish? When we must pray for or against whatever party the parson pleases? Offer our devotions according to the religious or political principles that the minister for the time chooses to embrace? Shift sides as your humors change, and address our God, as Arians, Socinians, or Sceptics, as the gentleman in the pulpit is inclined? Sure, if our civil liberty were not something more substantial, we should be the greatest slaves in Europe! Again, what purity can there possibly be in our worship, when the passions, prejudices, and whimsical opinions of every minister may, and do mix with it? I have always been at a loss to determine, whether your confidence in entertaining us with such harangues, and your power of face in keeping your countenances, and stifling the laugh, or our stupidity in not perceiving the gross affront, and patience in not resenting it, were most to be admired. I cannot imagine that you are so weak as to think, with the bulk of our people, that our worship must of conse-

quence be pure, if it be different from the practice of the Church of Rome: and that we can only err upon the side of superstition. If this be your opinion, it resembles the conduct of some Germans, of whom I have read, who, for fear of the Roman army, ran into a river and were drowned. Just so the greater part of our people, (for I believe better things of you,) conclude that our worship must be pure, if we do not worship images, pray to saints, or adore the Virgin Mary; though it be mixed with the whimsical notions, enthusiastic opinions and silly nostrums, of every quack doctor in divinity. It would be happy if you would content yourselves, with insulting the people only, with such harangues: but you often make them insult their God, or at least, you do it in their names, by thanking him for establishing a pure worship, which he did not establish: a worship which cannot possibly be pure; and which even in your own opinion is not pure, for if the moderate party consists of such ministers as the author of the *Characteristics** (who is said to be one of your order) has represented them to the world, God have mercy upon the souls committed to their care! and may the Almighty pity and relieve the congregations whose devotions they compose, dictate, and offer. Yet, in all probability, if the moderate men were to write characteristics, they would give us as forbidding a picture of the party that our author is pleased to call orthodox. What then must become of us poor laymen, whose souls are bandied about between the factions, and our prayers offered

* *Ecclesiastical Characteristics*, published at Glasgow, 1750

sometimes upon the principles of one, ~~and~~ sometimes upon the principles of the other? Would it not be happy for us that we had some pious primitive form of prayer, that would secure the purity and reasonableness of our prayers, let the minister's private opinions be what they would? As things are at present, it is impossible that our service can be either reasonable, perfect or pure; unless we can suppose, that our church has a privilege, which no other church upon earth ever had or ever claimed. I mean, that no weak or whimsical minister, no factious fire-brand, no sceptic or enthusiast, can mount our pulpits: or that after men of these characters get into them, they will pray better than they are able, upon principles that they do not believe, or with a calmness which they do not possess. Now, supposing that there are only* an hundred of our ministers of some or other of the above characters, and that one with another each of them has five hundred souls under his charge, there will be fifty thousand persons in Scotland, who never worship God in public in the way of his own appointment, and whose public worship must be dangerous to themselves and unacceptable to the Deity. Where must the blood of these poor people fall, but upon the rulers of the church? who, though they have found by fatal experience, that all the subscriptions in the world, will not hinder men of pernicious principles from creeping into the church, yet will not take the only effectual method to prevent them from doing mischief there.

* This is not an unreasonable calculation, in these latter ages, considering that there was one of twelve who proved a traitor, even when our Lord was visibly present with his Church.

But besides the injustice of assuming to yourselves a right to dictate to us what prayers you please ; besides the absurdity of making us offer contradictory petitions, and leaving our public worship exposed to the whims and follies of the sceptic and enthusiast, there are many other inconveniences that attend our present method. First, it is a question whether the laity can join at all in our public prayers. For we must either suppose that they go along with the minister, offering every word as he utters it, or wait until he has finished the sentence, and then examine it, and give their assent. If the first be their method, it is evident that they place an absurd and dangerous confidence in the honesty and ability of the parson, and embrace in their prayers, all the whimsical notions, and pernicious principles, that he may chance to mix with them : and further, that many of them will, like parrots, talk what they do not understand ; since many words will occur whose meaning and importance they are not able at all to conceive. At least, I find it so with myself. Perhaps our people may be inspired with more than ordinary penetration, in the time of prayer ; but at other times, I find it difficult enough to make many of them comprehend an ordinary message, delivered in the plainest words that I can possibly find : and after repeating it over and over again, have the mortification to find, that they misunderstand me, though the whole passage does not exceed two sentences. That these men should understand all the expressions in an extempore prayer, and with their understandings and judg-

ments keep pace with the minister for half an hour, or twenty minutes, to me appears impossible; and I believe, will appear even to you, very miraculous. But suppose that our people wait till the minister has finished the sentence, and then compare the several parts, examine the whole, and give their assent; God knows how unfit many of them are for this task. But let them be ever so fit, if a word be lost, if a word occurs whose meaning they do not understand, or if the arrangement of the words be perplexed, it is evident that they cannot give a rational assent; and if they take time to examine what may be suspicious, to supply what is lost, or to unravel what is perplexed, let them be as quick as they will, the subsequent sentence will be lost. I do not indeed suppose that the bulk of our congregations ever dreamt of these difficulties; because they give themselves no trouble about understanding, examining, or assenting: but content themselves with being humble hearers, and perhaps in all their lives, never once gave a sincere and rational amen to public prayers; though hearing another pray, and joining in prayer, be very different things.

Another inconvenience that attends our way of worship, is, that young gentlemen, just come from the university, full fraught with philosophy, and fond of shewing their learning, very injudiciously vent their notions in our public prayers. A young spruce gentleman, the other Sunday, converted us in an instant, from plain country people, into profound philosophers; and these too, of the dogmatical kind:

for we told God Almighty many things concerning his own works, which the learned gentleman, it seems, thought he did not know before ; many things that we neither understood nor believed :^{*} we travelled so high that our heads began to turn ; and after all lost our gentleman, for fifteen minutes, among other things that he called vortices ; and began indeed to suspect that he was swallowed up by them, or gone where Milton tells us all vain and empty things go :

—————Up whirl'd aloft,
Fly o'er the backside of the world far off,
Into a limbo large and broad, since call'd
The Paradise of Fools.*

Whether he visited that place or not, we cannot tell ; but we found him at last upon earth chasing a mole. Had he been pleased to tell us these things, stripped of their philosophic garb, in a sermon, some of them might have been entertaining, some of them useful, and most of them tolerable : but to make us inform the Deity of things that we neither knew nor believed, and as it were, instruct our Maker in the nature, beauty, and order of his own works, (I humbly think,) was imprudent and presumptuous. However, he made a shift by new-coined words, and terms of art, to be far above the reach of our understandings ; and to pray with him we must have read Euclid, studied Newton's works more than our Bibles, and brought half a dozen of dictionaries to church with us, to help us to the meaning of his words. The gentleman, however, obtained his end ; the people stared, and when they

* Milton's Paradise Lost, book iii. 495.

came out, concluded that he was admirably learned, and that none was so fit to be their minister. Upon this whim, they vigorously opposed the settlement of a pious and prudent gentleman, presented to the charge by the patron, and are most piously supported in their wise opposition by a set of the clergy, I suppose, for conscience sake. But I beg pardon : digression is a fault. My business is only with our public worship ; and I flatter myself that you will own, that upon that Sunday, it was but poorly performed : yet such farces as these we are often forced to bear with. And instead of the humble expressions of penitents, the concise petitions of poor mortals, and the grateful thanksgivings of rational creatures, to their merciful God, our prayers frequently consist of the foolish ostentation of learning, and the harsh jargon of hard words.

Neither does our worship suffer more by the ostentatious folly, and pedantic humour of our young Domines, than by the natural and necessary decays of the invention, memory, and judgment of our aged ministers. For as the clergy are foolish enough to vie in the expenses of dress, table and equipage, with the landed gentlemen, most of them are unable, and all of them are unwilling, to call an assistant, as long as they are able to creep into a pulpit, and prattle out something like a prayer : so that you will frequently find a man inventing and dictating the devotions of a congregation, who is superannuated to all the other affairs of life. This man, it seems, has a right to make us address our Maker, in what manner,

and with what words he thinks proper : though in common conversation, we cannot help perceiving that his memory has lost its strength, that his understanding is decayed, and all the powers of his mind sadly declined. It would perhaps be cruel to give instances of the blunders, blasphemy, and nonsense, that have been mixed with our prayers by this misfortune, though many instances might be produced. But it is (I humbly think) more cruel, and highly unreasonable, to put the aged ministers under the necessity of exposing their weakness, and dishonouring the service of their Maker; and the laity under the hardship, either of offering nonsense or blasphemy, instead of pious, ardent and expressive prayers, or of reducing their minister to want and beggary in his old age, by forcing him to call an assistant, whether he can maintain him or not : especially as all danger might be prevented, and all deficiencies supplied, by composing and establishing a pious form of prayer ; for he might read a prayer very devoutly and distinctly, when he cannot invent readily, or dictate an extemporary prayer to the congregation, with propriety and judgment ; or if he chanced to blunder, or pronounce indistinctly, having the form before us, we could easily supply the defects. We could much better put up with the trifling in his sermons, and patiently hear him prattle “ about his subject and about it,” because we could supply our loss in some measure, by reading some of the best sermons ourselves, or to our families. But public prayer is a matter of that importance, that there is no possibility

of supplying it by our own industry, no rectifying mistakes after the prayer is offered, and no possibility of preventing very gross and dangerous blunders, while we perform this part of our worship after the present method. For though our aged ministers should retain all the powers of their minds to the last, which is not the case with one in a hundred; though they should be able to invent extemporaneous petitions with propriety; yet, as the organs of the body decay, it is impossible that they can express them with that strength of voice, and distinctness of pronunciation, which are necessary to us, before we can give a rational assent, if we can at all give a rational assent, to prayers that we have never examined; no, nor yet the minister himself. The weak voice, the trembling body, the want of teeth, and other infirmities incident to old age, do often render the pronunciation so indistinct, that in our present way of worship, one half of the congregation is at as great a loss as if the gentleman prayed in an unknown tongue; or at most, they can only pick up a word here and there without any connection. Let us suppose that among more than a thousand ministers, there are only eighty whose understandings, or bodily organs are thus decayed; and that one with another, each of them has five hundred souls under his charge: it would be a misfortune to those who are under the care of the first, if they did join in the public worship as it is performed among them; and they who are under the care of the last, cannot possibly do it. So that there must be in Scotland, at least forty thousand persons, who are debar-

red from the most essential part of public worship, by the old age of our ministers, joined with the absurdity of our present plan. To which, if we add fifty thousand I mentioned before, there will be ninety thousand persons in this nation, who cannot worship God at all in public, or worship him in a way unworthy of him, and dangerous to themselves, whose blood must be crying to heaven against the rulers of our church. For whether the above calculations be allowed to be just or not, there must certainly be a very considerable number of our brethren in this distressed situation: unless we suppose, contrary to known matter of fact, that the ministers of our church are not subject to the same infirmities of body and mind that other men are subject to; and that they are secured by some sacred infallibility, from embracing enthusiastical or sceptical opinions.

But further our worship, as it is performed at present, is not only corrupted by the contrary petitions of contending parties; not only tinged with the heats and animosities that arise in synods and assemblies; not only mixed with the whimsical opinions and pernicious principles of libertines and enthusiasts that climb up into our pulpits; not only rendered obscure and contemptible, by the pedantry and affected learning of the younger, and the weaknesses of mind and body of our older ministers; but frequently interlarded with ill-timed compliments to the great, or the ministers' favorites, and the grossest abuses of those who have the misfortune to be out of favor. I could produce numerous instances of both, and, were it not an invid-

ious task, point out the persons, places and times. Upon the marriage of a certain noble peer in this nation, the parson carried his compliments so far in the public prayers, that he exceeded all the bounds of decency, and made his female hearers blush ; and I should blush to repeat to the rulers of our church, in a letter, the expressions that he made use of to the God of heaven and earth, in the face of a congregation : So extravagant and ill-chosen were his words, that the lady was forced to direct the clergyman, and intreat him to forbear his rude petitions. A minister, even in one of our royal burghs, observing a young gentleman, son to one of the magistrates, in church, after a journey to London, made all the congregation thank God, that he had brought back their friends from foreign lands. Most men, I presume, will remember how grossly the royal commander of his Majesty's forces, during the last war, was abused, by having his praises wrought into our public prayers by rough and unskilful hands. Some allowances, I own, are to be made for the clergy in this instance : the augmentation scheme* was then in agitation, and the weaker part of them foolishly thought that this would pave the way for it.

On the other hand, he must be a great stranger in our congregations, or very heedless when he comes there, who has not observed, that sometimes a well-meant zeal, and sometimes too warm an attachment to party opinions, with respect to religious subjects, and private resentments too, have taught ministers of keen passions, to use several expressions,

* A law for modifying the stipends to the clergy. *New Ed. Ency.*

not only inconsistent with the charity of Christians, but even with the humanity of men. *Vex them in thy wrath, and plead with them in thy displeasure, through all eternity,* was the unchristian petition of Mr.—with respect to papists. *Pour down the vials of thy wrath upon them, and burn their flesh with fire,* was Mr. C——'s ungenerous wish. Nothing but heat of zeal, and hurry of passion, could have dictated these petitions; and I am far from thinking that many of our ministers suffer themselves to be driven to so great lengths: But all of them are subject to passions; and what is left to the discretion of the minister, is left also to the indiscretion and passions of man; and we frequently find the two last, where the first was designed to take place. Many instances could be given of the ill-timed flattery of friends, and unchristian expressions with respect to enemies, that have been vented in our public prayers: but I am tender of the reputation of the clergy, and do not choose to expose their errors farther than is absolutely necessary to show the danger and absurdity of our present way of worship; and to persuade them to recover and secure its purity and decency: and therefore I humbly entreat you to consider whether the ill-timed, ill-chosen compliments of sycophants upon the one hand, and the unchristian expressions of keen zealots upon the other, do not render our public worship contemptible and dangerous; and whether there be any thing so likely to prevent them from indulging their humors, to the dishonor of God and disgrace of religion, as some well-chosen, pious, public form of prayer.

After flattery, we may mention Politics, in which our ministers will be dabbling, in spite of grace, nature, and common sense, as another very fruitful source of blunders in our worship. Few of them have genius, fewer still have sufficient intelligence, and all of them are at too great a distance from the seat of government to comprehend the secret intrigues of courts, or to perceive, in spite of the varnish by which they are disguised, the real views of parties: yet all of them will be meddling; and in every dispute, our prayers must take a side, and the poor laymen must address their Maker, sometimes upon the faith of a foolish rumor, and often upon the credit of common news. To say nothing of the times, very wittily, but very truly described by Butler in his Hudibras,

When gospel-trumpeter, surrounded
With long-ear'd rout, the battle sounded,
And pulpit, drum ecclesiastic,
Was beat by fist, instead of a stick :

Not (I say) to mention these days, whose history will be an eternal disgrace to our religion, and would furnish as many instances of nonsense and blasphemy vented in our public prayers, as would be sufficient to fill up a large volume; even in latter days, politics have introduced very gross absurdities into our public service. I am not yet an old man, and I remember to have been made to pray that God would pull down the bloody house of Austria. During the last war, I earnestly begged that he would build it up. Now I begin to give broad hints that I would have it pulled down again; and am expecting, every Sunday, to be made to desire it in a formal manner. The interests

and leagues of the states of Europe shift so frequently, that we are often flung out in our prayers, and pray for our enemies as if they were our friends, and against our friends as if they were our enemies. Would our ministers be contented to make us pray in general for our friends, and against the devices of our enemies, we should never be wrong: but they choose to mention whom they mean, lest omniscient Wisdom should mistake, or at least that their people may know that they are great politicians, and very zealous for the public good. Many a time have I thanked God for giving us glorious victories, when we have been shamefully beaten; for inspiring courage into our troops, when they have run away; for success granted to our arms in battles that were never fought; and for deliverance from plots that were never formed. Our public worship, in the present way, has always been and will always be tinctured with the spirit of party, and made the property of faction in church and state. When the famous Cambuslang conversion was going on, (I shall never forget it,) one Sunday morning I was made to thank God for the manifestation of his power in that conversion, and intreat him to continue the great work he had begun. In the afternoon, by an unlucky change of ministers, I was made to pray that God would put a stop to the delusions of the devil, by which the ignorant and simple were deceived, and give us grace to resist that spirit of enthusiasm, that had gone out into our land. Thus, what I ascribed to God in the morning, I ascribed to the devil in the after-

noon; and what I had requested God to promote, I requested him too to give me grace to resist. I prayed long and earnestly with Walpole's enemies, before their intrigues and my prayers could pull him down; and when he fell I was made to thank God for the great deliverance; though it was soon discovered, that it was nothing more than a struggle for power between parties, and a matter of no moment to me or my country, which of the parties was in or out: However, all ranks contributed something to raise the clamor: the mob made bonfires, the magistrates rung the bells, the ministers gave their prayers, and the mountain brought forth a mouse.

Nay, I have known the private piques and little quarrels between the parson and his neighbors, introduced into public worship, and made a part of our prayers: Even when the parson was the first aggressor, he had the assurance to complain to God, (as he called it,) and, what was still more unreasonable, made his parishioners complain with him, or at least he complained in their names, though most of them were very sensible that he himself had done the injustice. How his complaints were received in heaven, I cannot tell; but I know they had their effects upon earth; for his antagonist, unable to bear the staring of the congregation every Lord's day, was forced to sit down under the injustice. It is hard to determine in this respect, whether you have the meanest opinion of your God or your hearers; for it seems you think that both are obliged to shift sides as you are pleased to direct them,

and, right or wrong, be still of the party which the parson for the time thinks fit to embrace. That you should treat the laity with so great contempt in this case, is not so surprising, as you may be convinced from long experience, that they will swallow down the grossest absurdities in their public prayers, and trust the propriety of their worship upon Sunday to the discretion and ability of a man, whose folly and weakness perhaps they laugh at all the week. But I own it is amazing, that you can use such freedom with the Deity, to desire him to do and undo as the fancy strikes you, or your designs chance to alter.

Our prayers are for the most part, too historical, and seem rather designed to instruct the congregation, than to confess their sins, express their wants, or offer their grateful thanksgivings. I do not at all suppose that you are ignorant as our people seem to be, of the difference between preaching and praying, or that you are not sensible that a very good sermon will make but a very bad prayer: but I cannot help thinking that you comply too far with the popular taste in this respect, and strive to please, by giving our public prayers as much the air and manner of a sermon as possible; or, knowing that many of your people judge of the propriety and excellency of a prayer by its length, to come up to the common standard, you are forced to fill up a gap with what materials come first to hand: and this I am more apt to believe to be the case, because we sometimes find half a dozen sentences from scripture poured into our prayers all at once, without the

least connexion among themselves, or the least relation to what went before, or follows after; and frequently too without the least affinity to any of the parts of prayer. *What Mr. For- dyce means, by that certain* happy irregularity* in our public prayer, which he is pleased to recommend, I profess I know not; but I know very well, that there is a certain unhappy irregularity in most of ours, that renders them very improper for public worship. The several parts of prayer are most absurdly confounded, though they require very different dispositions of heart: confession is jumbled with thanksgiving; petition is mixed with narration; and sometimes we have all the parts of prayer in one single sentence. By these means the mind is held in suspense, and cannot settle to that humility, conviction and sorrow, that ought to attend confession; nor is it raised to that warm gratitude, and ardent love, that ought to enliven our thanksgivings; neither is it filled with that sense of dependence, nor formed to that serious earnestness and lively faith, with which our petitions ought to be sent forth.

Instead of these, amused with the novelty of expression, and distracted with the quick and irregular successions of the several parts of prayer, it fluctuates between these sensations, and feels not much of any of them. When all the powers of the soul should be employed in their proper places and making their greatest efforts to offer a spiritual worship to the Father of spirits, our curiosity is only awake, and we are

* Edification, &c. page 15.

listening to a prayer, no otherwise than we do a sermon. I would beg leave further to observe, that our extemporary worship in the church, produces very bad effects with respect to our worship in our families: for, as praying to God extempore, is the prevailing fashion, and as our people are taught to despise worship offered by a form, so those of them who want memory, learning, and invention, to express themselves extempore with propriety, and have modesty to be ashamed of indecent expressions, and reflection to think of the danger of unreasonable and unchristian petitions, never pray with their families at all. On the other hand, when ignorance and self-sufficiency meet in the master of a family, their worship, of consequence, is a miserable mixture of nonsense, error and blasphemy. The most ignorant, are always the most presuming; and the less sense that a man has of the nature and importance of prayer, the more readily will he venture upon extemporary worship. In fact, it is true, that many of our people, who can hardly repeat their creed, and know very little more of their religion, than a few hard words that they have gleaned out of our catechisms, imitate our parsons in praying extempore; and approach their Maker, with as great familiarity as they would do their neighbour; and with much less respect and reverence, than they dare treat their laird. Good God! what pitiful scenes have I seen of this kind! what rude and shocking expressions! what blasphemous petitions have I heard! how often have I trembled when the ignorant and proud *enthu-*

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siast kneeled down with his family to his extemporary worship! How often have I shuddered at the whimsical notions that he wrought into our prayers, the insolent and unchristian expressions which he used, and the nonsense that he offered in our name! How often has my heart bled in secret, for the sad situation of many miserable families, who, by our unhappy attachment to extemporary prayer, either want family worship altogether, or offer their worship in such a manner, as dishonors God, disgraces religion, and is very dangerous to themselves! But I would very far exceed the bounds of a letter, and I am afraid, weary out your patience, if I should endeavor to lay before you, all the inconveniencies that attend our present way of worship. And I flatter myself, if you will add to those already taken notice of, the blunders of ignorance, the flights of vanity, the heedless silly repetitions, the unguarded expressions, and the childish thoughts, that are mixed with our prayers, (and must be mixed with them, unless you can suppose, that all our ministers are men of the greatest abilities, elocution and prudence,) you will see, that our present way of worship is defective, unreasonable and dangerous: and that the hardships that the laity labour under, and the danger to which they are exposed, can only be removed, by some devout and approved form of prayer.

To support the present absurd practice, to make the laity sit quietly down with the injustice done them, and to blind their eyes, that they may not perceive the disadvantages that

they labour under, and the danger to which they are exposed, it has been said that *a form of prayer will limit the inspiration of the Spirit; that it deadens the devotion of the people; that all the wants of a Christian congregation cannot be expressed by a form*: and some have been so foolish as to say, that it is *unlawful* to worship by a form of prayer. Will you pardon my presumption, and hear me with patience, if I humbly offer my thoughts upon these heads: I hope you will. As to the first, I might boldly appeal to your own consciences; and ask you, *in the name of God, do you believe that you are inspired? Have you indeed so mean an opinion of the understanding and judgment of the laity, as to imagine that any of them, who think at all, can ever be brought to believe, that the prayers we commonly hear, are dictated by the Holy Ghost? Or, have you so little regard to the honor of God, and the interests of religion, as to ascribe your extemporary effusions to the Holy Spirit?* No, I am persuaded that none but the rankest enthusiast, will ever urge this argument against a form of prayer. And I will beg leave to ask such; are the words, or the matter of your prayers, or both inspired? That the words are not inspired, is evident, from the difficulty that you frequently have, to find proper words; from the improper, and sometimes indecent expressions, that fall from you; from the ill-timed pauses that you are forced to make; and the most useful supplement of coughing, groaning and spitting, that must come in to your assistance. But supposing that you were indeed in-

spired with words ; it would be of small importance to yourselves, or to us, unless the matter of your prayers be inspired too : and if the matter of them be inspired, your prayers are of equal authority with the Scriptures themselves, and should be entered into the canon. I know not how to excuse the negligence of the people of this nation, in suffering so much sound doctrine to be lost : it might have cleared up some difficult passages in Scripture, and decided several important disputes. I know not what to say for this piece of negligence, unless our people think that all things necessary for Christians to know, to believe, and to practice, are revealed in the Holy Scriptures : and that they may be taught by them what to ask in prayer, and how to regulate their lives. And if this be true, your inspiration is a very great gift, bestowed for very poor purposes ; only to save you the pains of searching the Scriptures, and the trouble of composing a form of prayer by the instructions and examples contained in them. The heathen poets themselves, had a greater reverence for the Deity than this : for it was a maxim among them,

Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit.

I submit whether you do not transgress against this rule, by introducing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, if the Scriptures be sufficient to direct us what to ask in prayer, and if they be not sufficient for this, the revelation of the will

* Hor. Art. Poet. Never let a God be introduced, unless there happens to be some *difficulty* worthy of such an agent.

of God, for our salvation, is defective in a very important point ; and neither the prophets, nor the apostles, no, nor our Saviour himself, though he enterprized it, have taught us, how to pray. But supposing that it were necessary, that the words and matter of our prayers, should be inspired by the Holy Ghost ; why might not a number of pious and learned divines, met together with such an interesting and great design, as that of composing a form of prayer for a whole Church, have as much reason to expect, and be as likely to receive the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as a private clergyman inventing the transient prayer of a particular congregation ? But this supposed inspiration in our extemporary way, will involve us in very great, nay, insuperable difficulties ; for we shall be as much puzzled where to find our miraculous inspiration, as the papists are where to fix their wonderful infallibility ; for, if we suppose that this inspiration is confined to any one of the several sects that use extemporary prayer, we prescribe to the Holy Spirit, and limit him, with a witness, and shall be sadly perplexed to determine to which particular party this wonderful privilege is given. If we suppose that this privilege is common to the ministers of all the sects, then we must conclude, that the Holy Ghost inspires opposite petitions to men of opposite principles, and directs one set to pray against another : for instance, if he inspires the burghers*

* Burgher and anti-burgher are the names of two parties among the Scotch seceders, taken from the cause of their quarrel ; an oath imposed in some of the royal boroughs in Scotland, upon those they admit into the corporation.

to pray against the principle of their seceding brethren the anti-burghers, and to cut them off from their communion by excommunication; we cannot suppose that he inspires the anti-burghers to return the compliment: and if he inspires the ministers of these sects to pray against the principle of the church established by law, he does not direct the ministers of the established church, in their public prayers, to call the secession a dangerous schism. That the ministers of the several sects do pray for the success of their several parties, and that God would hinder the spreading of the principles of the other sects, is evident to all the world. Now, unless we would be guilty of the boldest blasphemy, and say that the Holy Ghost chimes in with the principles of the parson, whatever they be, (as the people are forced to do,) we must conclude, that this inspiration is not granted but to one of the sects; and I shall only request each of them to use a form of prayer, until they shall be able to prove that this gift of inspiration belongs to them. And that the established church, with which I have to do, may be more willing to hear and grant my request, I will produce some strong presumptions that it does not belong to them: indeed, the instances that I have given above, are more than sufficient for this purpose. But I shall further add, first, that if the confession of faith be true, none of our ministers are inspired in their prayers; for there all mankind are divided, into two classes, the elect and the reprobates: yet it is evident, beyond all possibility of dispute, that the elect pray as

if it were possible that they may be damned; and the reprobates, as if it were possible that they may be saved; and yet it is impossible that the Holy Spirit inspires either of them with these prayers, unless we be so impious as to imagine, that he directs them to pray upon false principles, and inspires them to pray for or against what he knows can never happen: And though some of you urge this argument of inspiration against your adversaries, yet our Church has in fact very fairly disclaimed it, by publishing and authorizing a directory for public prayer; unless we would suppose them so presumptuous as to direct the Holy Spirit how to pray. In truth, our presbyterian inspiration, is as mysterious and as useless a gift, as the popish infallibility. The popish church has an infallibility lodged somewhere, but she knows not where to find it in time of need: We Presbyterians have an inspiration among us, but we know not to which of all these sects it belongs. The infallible church is filled with disputes, which her infallibility cannot determine; and the inspired church has nonsense, contradiction, and whimsical opinions, vented in her public prayers, which her inspiration does not prevent. The infallible church, has the most unreasonable and absurd creed of any church upon earth; and the inspired church has, and will have (while she adheres to her present plan,) a very defective, unreasonable, and dangerous kind of public worship: so fully, and justly, does the providence of Heaven confute the vain pretensions of presumptuous men.

But it may be said, and it has been said, that this gift of inspiration is not universal to all our ministers, nor uniform and constant to any of them; but granted, now and then, by fits and starts, something (I suppose) like the Gift of the Spirit. I cannot help thinking, if this be the case, that the Quakers proceed more judiciously than we: *they* patiently wait in silence until they feel, or imagine they feel the influences of the Spirit; but if he does not condescend to venture to do without him: *they* humbly submit to his will, to inspire whom he pleases; but *we* confine him to the minister: so that when the influence ceases; but we wear our glasses, let his influences cease with them. I would therefore humbly propose that, like Quakers, we should leave the Spirit, and permit any one of the congregation who chanced to be inspired, to dictate the devotions; or, that a form of prayer be composed and authorized, only to be used when the minister feels no inspiration. Let him have the liberty to depart from the form, when upon his mind the miraculous influence of the Holy Spirit, suggesting the matter of the prayers. By this method we shall gain very considerable advantages; first, we shall always worship, either by inspiration, or by an approved form, and be certain (unless the parson deceives us,) that the ignorance, affectation, ill-timed zeal, pride or passions of the man himself, cannot tincture our public worship, or mix themselves with our prayers. And next, we shall discover when our parsons are inspir-

ed ; for, as things are managed at present, this miracle is as much lost in our presbyterian church, as the famous miracle of transubstantiation is among the papists. In both churches, there is a wonderful manifestation of almighty power ; yet no one is able to perceive it in either. The papists are convinced that bread and wine are converted into flesh and blood, though, to all the senses, they remain bread and wine still : we Presbyterians are persuaded that our ministers are sometimes inspired, though we cannot tell when the inspiration begins or ends ; and though our ministers, in this case, lie under the same misfortune that Hudibras did,

When with greatest art he spoke,
You'd think, he talk'd like other folk :

so it unluckily fares with them, when they pray most by inspiration, they only pray like other people ; and all my attention and skill have never been able to discover the inspiration in one single instance. But by the method that I am proposing, we shall discover, that the inspiration immediately begins, when the minister departs from the established form : and perhaps we may make another discovery ; I mean, that the rage of party, the spirit of pride and enthusiasm, as frequently inspire our ministers, as the spirit of peace and love. In a word, let those ministers who have pride enough to believe, and presumption to affirm, that they are inspired, and can find people so ignorant and credulous as to believe them, or so tame and indifferent as to trust their devo-

tions to an imaginary inspiration : let these, I say, use the present method, but have pity upon us who see the difficulty, disadvantages, and great danger of our present way of worship.

As we cannot find in scripture any promise of such a gift ; as we are convinced that there can be no need of it, (unless we suppose, that the Holy Ghost has not fully revealed the will of God for our salvation ;) as we are absolutely certain that you are not all inspired, and have no reason to believe that any one of you is so ; we presume most humbly and most earnestly to request, that some pious form of prayer may be composed and authorized. The only inspiration that is promised in scripture, that is necessary, or that can be useful, is, that the Holy Spirit will inspire the hearts of the faithful with affections proper for this important duty ; such as shame and sorrow in confession, an humble Christian hope of obtaining what we ask in our petitions, gratitude and love in our thanksgiving, and such other affections as are suitable to the several parts of prayer ; and no man, I believe, will say that the Holy Spirit cannot, or prove that he will not inspire our hearts with these affections, as easily and as readily when we pray by a form, as when we pray without one. And as far as prayer may be considered as one of the means of inspiring these affections, a form seems better calculated to answer that purpose, in public assemblies, than extemporary effusions : for in the extempore way, the hearer, (if he has any sense of the nature and importance of prayer,) must begin the duty with a trembling heart, and go

through it with a continual diffidence, as he trusts it entirely to the discretion of another man; sometimes to a man whom he never saw before, and always to a man who has not so much as calmly considered it himself. He must often suspend his assent, when he is not satisfied with the propriety of the expression; he must lose the sense, where the sentence is intricate; and through the whole, be in perplexity, suspicion, fear, and real danger. Whereas, when prayers are offered by a form, no word need escape him; he understands every word; he perceives the connexion of every sentence; and let the minister's judgment be ever so weak, his learning ever so little, his manner of expressing himself perplexed, his principles pernicious, his passions ever so keen, and his party prejudices ever so violent; yet in spite of all these, he offers a reasonable service, and breathes forth the warm feelings of his soul, in decent, devout, heart-affecting, and heart-approved prayers. This observation may in a great measure obviate the second objection; I mean, that a form of prayer does not so much enliven the devotion of the people; but I beg leave further to observe, that they who are used to worship in the extemporary way, cannot be competent judges in this case; because they have not fairly made the experiment, but reason only from speculation. When they drop into a place where forms are used, they come in with strong prejudices; they are entire strangers to the form, are perplexed in all the parts of it.

It happens with them in this case, as it does with men in every other thing ; what they have not been accustomed to, appears strange. what they are unacquainted with, seems perplexed ; and what they do not know reasons for, is apt to appear unreasonable. It may be too, that the ignorant miss the unnatural cant, the frantic gestures, and fearful distortions of the face, that in their opinion, are essential parts of prayer. But let a man of sense and candor, make himself master of a form, and try the experiment for a year or two, by attending carefully to prayers offered in that way ; and then and not till then, will he be able to determine whether the form, or the extemporary method, has the noblest effect to enliven his devotions. At least it is certain, that many who have tried both, give their opinion in favor of a form ; and that they who use a form of prayer, constantly affirm, that they feel it ten times more enlivening, and better calculated to inspire our devout affections, than extemporary effusions. And there must be something in it, because the professors of all religions under the sun, have chosen this method : the Christian Church universally used it till the fifteenth century, and indeed may be said to do so at present ; for we make such a small part of the Catholic Church, that our practice hardly deserves to be considered as an exception.

I shall not dwell long upon the speculative arguments that are offered by either side ; because ingenious men will always find something plausible to say, in defence of a practice, which answers their purposes. They who

use forms, say, that their minds are free from all distraction and fear, and have nothing else to do, but attend to the object of their prayers, and maintain upon their minds a constant and lively sense of the importance of the business in which they are engaged, free from the care of examining every sentence before they offer it as their petition; secure that no indecent or unchristian expression can mix with the devotions, being already satisfied of the propriety of the whole form. They say that the mind of man is not able to attend to many things at once; and that in our way of worship, if the people offer a reasonable service, they must examine every sentence, hear every word, and understand every word they hear; and they must remember what went before, if they would conceive the connexion; that they must unravel what is expressed in a perplexed manner, if they would pray with judgment; and in fine, that they must give their amen to their prayers, with a more superficial examination of them, and a much less perfect knowledge of their contents, than they would venture to set their subscription to, in an address to their superiors upon earth.

We answer, that the novelty and variety of the expression, in our extemporary method, help to fix the mind and keep up the attention. They ask us, upon what the mind is fixed? upon the object and matter of our prayers or upon the novelty and variety of expression? If we say upon the object and matter of our prayers, they will tell us, that there are in these, neither novelty nor variety to assist us; because our

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prayers are always addressed to that Being, who is the *same to-day, yesterday, and forever*; and the matter of our prayers in public must always be nearly the same: but if our minds be fixed upon the variety of the expression, or novelty of the phrase, they say, (and I fear they speak truth,) that this is not prayer, but mere amusement; such as the mind receives from music, a song, or an entertaining piece of history; that it might perhaps prepare the mind for prayer, but is not prayer, any more than a sermon is prayer.

It is evident that many of our ministers are sensible, that their people attend only to the outward circumstances of their prayers, and that the way to be popular, is, to tickle their ears with strange sounds, or please their eyes with antic gestures; else why do many of them affect such an unmanly whining cant? Why use such dismal heavy tones, and draw out their words to such an immoderate length? Or why do they affect such distortions in their faces? All the world will acknowledge, that these are neither necessary nor useful parts of prayer, unless to please the silly vulgar, who, regard little more than the sound and circumstances of our prayers.

But whatever weight may be in the speculative arguments upon either side, experience and matter of fact are fairly against us; for those who say, that forms of prayer enliven devotion, seem, by a certain decency observable among them in time of service, to confirm what they say; while the visible inattention and indifference of our congregations, flatly contra-

dict our arguments and prove to the very senses, that our extemporary prayers do not enliven our devotions. In assemblies where forms are used, there is at least the appearance of devotion, and an air of seriousness. None of them are seen sleeping in time of service, few of them gazing about them; not one of them ever presumes, (unless in a case of absolute necessity,) to remove, till the whole service be ended, and they frequently meet in public for the business of prayer, which* Mr. Fordyce justly complains we never do, and seems to think that it would be very difficult to persuade our people to it. Thus the practice of those who use forms of prayer, proves to me, more effectually, than all the speculative arguments that can be offered, that they have an higher opinion of the great duty of public prayer, feel a greater pleasure from it, or are some way or other more affected by it than our people are. Whereas in our assemblies, there is not so much as the air of devotion not even the outward appearance of seriousness and attention; many are sleeping, more gazing about them, and all of them * *betray a visible impatience until prayer is over, that they may be entertained with something more to their liking.* When sermon is over, do we not see them remove in crowds, through one half of our service, and that the most solemn half still remains? Perhaps it may be thought, that this is not a fair account of the matter, and that I misrepresent things. Will you believe your own brethren? they shall vouch what I have said: let us first

• Edification by public Institutions.

hear Mr. Bennet's report of the devotion of our brethren in England: * "That careless air, (says he,) which sits upon the face of a congregation, when engaged in prayer, shows how little they know of the matter; and how few seriously join in public and solemn prayer; some gaze about them, others fall asleep—others fix their eye, it may be on the minister, and are affected with what he says: but then they only hear him pray, and are moved with the prayer, just as they hear sermons, and are moved thereby, (a most lively picture of our public worship!)—I must profess to you, should the enemies of our way of worship be present to observe us, there is nothing I should be so much ashamed of, as our exceeding careless, irreverent, indevout manner of joining in public prayer." So far Mr. Bennet bears witness to the want of devotion in congregations in England, where extemporary prayers are used. Let us now see if this way of worship has any better success or happier effects among us here in Scotland. Alas! it is every where the same unnatural, unreasonable, lifeless thing. Let Mr. Fordyce speak for the Scotch congregations: "I doubt not, my brethren, (speaking to the clergy) but you have frequently observed when the minister of God has been addressing him in the name, and as the mouth of the people, the greater part of them seem to be doing any thing, rather than join in the solemn service; in reality there is no exercise of a spiritual nature, which the generality seem to

* Sermon upon joining in public prayer, p. 112.

regard so little, or to attend so listlessly; seem, did I say? the expression is much too feeble; their insensibility and irreverence in this respect are, from the whole of their deportment, most shamefully distinguishable and flagrant.* If this be true, as indeed it is the very *truth*, I may be allowed to add, that it is most shamefully impudent in us, to allege that forms of prayer ~~er~~ deaden the devotion of the people, and that our extemporary method enlivens it. The little respect, nay, visible contempt, that our people show of public prayers, proves more clearly than all speculative arguments that can be offered, that our present way of worship is very ill calculated for enlivening the devotion of the people: I have proved by two unexceptionable witnesses, and had it been consistent with the brevity I proposed, could have produced many more, to prove, that our devotion is not only dead, but wants even all appearance of life. In truth it needs no proof, for every Sunday will show that we want attention, and reverence, to this most important duty; and every impartial heart will tell its owner, (if he understands the nature of prayer,) that it is very difficult to join in our public worship as it is at present performed; that it is impossible to do it rationally; that it cannot be attempted, without great danger; and that in fact he does it very seldom, and even then in a very faint and lifeless manner.

Allow me next to consider the third objection offered against forms of prayer. I mean, that

* Edification by public Institutions.

the wants of a congregation cannot be so fully expressed in that way; as by the extemporary method. This objection supposes, that a number of the most learned and pious men of the age, (for such I imagine would be employed,) deliberately composing a form of prayer, calmly recollecting the matter of it, frequently reviewing the whole, furnished with all the ancient and modern liturgies, directed by all that has been written on the subject, and assisted by every one who wishes well to religion and virtue, are more likely to omit some necessary petition, than a single person, perhaps of very indifferent talents, and a very moderate education, trusting entirely to an extemporary invention, and to his own memory. The man who can suppose this, hardly deserves to be reasoned with; for it is evident, that, in the first case, our prayers will be brought as near perfection as possible; and that in the second, many things must be omitted, many injudiciously expressed, many needlessly repeated, and the whole tinged with weakness, passions, and party-principles of the speaker; and that his best performances will be as much inferior to a general form of prayer, as he himself is in discretion, learning, and judgment, to the greatest men that have written upon the subject, and to a number of men of the best hearts, and calmest, ablest heads, convened to compose the form. The wants, and consequently the matter of the petitions of a Christian congregation, must in the main be always the same; they will at all times have sins to confess, still have need to ask

pardon, and implore the divine grace to direct their thoughts, words and actions; it will ever be their duty to pray for all ranks of men, &c. If any general calamity should happen; such as war, famine, pestilence, proper forms may be provided; in private cases, perhaps it might be more for the honor of our religion, and decency of our worship, that we did not descend to particular circumstances, so much as we do. It is needless to describe the disease to an omniscient God; most cases of this nature, might be comprehended under the general names of sickness and distress; but if it be thought proper to deal with God Almighty as we do with an ordinary doctor, and to lay the case before him at full length, methods may be found to indulge the humour of the clergy, in this respect, without leaving our whole worship to their discretion, and putting all our public petitions in their power.

Should the spiritual condition of a congregation be altered, (if it possibly can alter so much, that the established form could not comprehend the case, which, in my humble opinion, cannot happen, if the form be well composed,) let the presbytery, synod, or commission of the assembly be applied to, and the case being calmly considered, its nature and tendency deliberately examined, and its truth and certainty ascertained; let a form of prayer be composed suitable to the case: but this is too delicate, too dangerous, and difficult an affair, to be trusted to the discretion or capacity of any one clergyman; for weakness, or villany, in this

respect, has more than once dishonoured our public prayers, with the grossest enthusiasm, perverted them to serve very bad purposes, and exposed the most solemn part of our service, as well as religion itself, to the ridicule of infidels.

In a word, the ordinary wants of a Christian congregation may, nay, must be more fully expressed by a form of prayer, than by extempore effusions; and extraordinary cases, after they are discovered and examined, may easily be provided for, and it is not only possible, but very easy, to provide for all cases that ought to be particularly mentioned in our public prayers, in the first composition of them. But to prevent all wrangling upon this subject, and (if possible,) to content the most self-sufficient clergyman, let there be a proper place in this proposed form of prayer, where the minister may have liberty to pray for all extraordinary cases, in what words he thinks proper. It is better, that a small part of our worship be exposed to the discretion, ignorance, and passions of the parson, than that the whole should be liable, as it is at present, to be made the property of faction, to be tinged with the prejudices and whimsical opinions of every private minister, and offered upon the pernicious principles of the deist, or the extravagant notions of the enthusiast.

I shall not dwell long upon the last objection, I mean that forms of prayer are unlawful, because I believe it never will be offered by men of sense and learning; and it is

losing time and pains to reason with such as are destitute of both. I shall only beg leave to observe, that they who say that forms of prayer are unlawful, in fact say, that God Almighty commanded, that our Saviour attended, used, and taught his disciples an unlawful way of worship: for that he did so, I have proved already, and our own directory for public worship acknowledges, that "Our Lord's prayer is not only a pattern for prayer, but is itself a most comprehensive prayer." Here I cannot help observing with regret, that wherever our directory directs well, there our clergy have despised our directory; for instance, it recommends that the Lord's prayer be used in our public worship; that ordinarily a chapter out of each Testament be read at every meeting: the first is neglected by most, and the last by all of them. It directs that our worship begin with prayer, but now it begins with praise; that the minister, before worship, shall solemnly exhort the people to the worshipping of the great name of God: but at present we rush into a very solemn part of worship, without a word of previous exhortation, and, I fear, very often, without a serious thought. It is easy to find out the reason why the Lord's prayer, and the reading of the Scriptures, have been jostled out of our service; they have been forced out to make room for Mass John's *more masterly performances*; but why the other alterations have been made, the clergy, who direct all things, can only tell. To them I leave it, and resume my subject. If forms are unlaw-

ful, we are unlawfully baptized, for that is done by a form ; and all the extemporary prayers which we use upon that occasion, are not essential to the sacrament, and are additions of men. We administer the Lord's Supper in an unlawful manner, for we do it by a form ; I mean the words of the first institution: we are dismissed every Lord's day with an unlawful blessing ; for one of the solemn forms with which the apostles concluded their epistles, is always used upon that occasion : so that nothing can be more inconsistent with ingenuity and common sense, than for us to cry out against forms, when the most solemn and important parts of our religion and worship are performed in that way, and when we neither baptize, nor communicate, nor bless our congregations in a lawful way, unless forms be lawful ; nor do these things in the best manner, unless doing them by a form be the best.

But further : if forms of prayer be not acceptable to God, and an useful way of worship for ourselves, we grossly offend every time that we meet in church : for it is impossible to sing eighteen or twenty lines of a psalm, but we offer some important petition by a form ; and some psalms might be pointed out that are almost continued prayers ; so that unless we will affirm, that our prayers are acceptable to God, and useful to ourselves when they are sung, but otherwise when they are said by a form, we must allow, that we are inconsistent with ourselves when we cry out against forms : that our ministers impose upon us when they spirit

us up against that way of worship, that they may have the better opportunity to gratify their own vanity, to manufacture our prayer after their own manner, and to mix them up with their own private *opinions*.

If extemporary worship be preferable, what good reason can be given why the ministers do not sing psalms extempore in our names, as well as offer extemporary prayers? for we are as much concerned to join in the last as in the first: a blunder in the one, is as dangerous as in the other, and we could as well go along with him in our hearts, when he sung an extemporary psalm, as we can do when he says an extemporary prayer. This inconsistency in our worship has not entirely escaped the observation of our brethren, for many of them have warmly insisted upon it, that the Spirit of God is restrained by using the *psalms of David*,* and therefore proposed that we should sing as well as pray extempore: and upon the supposition, that public worship in the extemporary way is most rational, they were certainly right; for no good reasons can be given for praising God by forms, that will not be equally good for praying to him in the same way; and no objection can be offered against the last, that will not be as strong against the first; for instance, if we say that praying to God by forms deadens the devotion of the people, so will praising him by forms too. If forms of prayer restrain the influences of the

* Heylin's History of the Presbyterians.

Holy Spirit, so must forms of praise. If forms of prayer cannot express all the wants of a Christian congregation, neither will forms of praise comprehend all the causes for which a Christian congregation may have reason to praise God; especially, as the forms we use were composed several thousand years ago and calculated chiefly for the Jewish religion and worship. If forms of prayer be unlawful in themselves, so must our forms of praise: because, as I observed before, they are often real prayers.

Supposing that extemporary worship was more acceptable to God, and useful to ourselves, no man in a congregation can reap the benefit of it but the parson. Our laity are most grossly mistaken, if they imagine that they pray extempore by our present method: for if they pray in the words of the minister, (and in his words they must pray, if they join at all in public worship,) they are as much confined to a form as any other people. For example, if the minister says, *Most gracious God, forgive us our sins; preserve us from danger, and provide for our necessities;* if the people repeat these words either in their minds, or with their mouths, or both, it is evident that they pray as much by form, as if the prayer had been composed a thousand years ago. In fact, it is impossible for a congregation to join in worship otherwise than by a form; and all the difference is, that we worship by a form with which we are entirely unacquainted; a form that we have never seen nor examined before; a form

that is trusted to the discretion and ability of the parson for the time, and which the minister himself has never once read over nor examined, even in the slightest manner. It is hard to determine whether his *presumption* in putting a form of prayer into our mouths, that he has never examined, or our complaisance in using a form that neither we nor our minister have ever once read over, is most unaccountable. But that either he or we should imagine, that to worship God in this manner is most rational for us, or most acceptable to him, is such an instance of the strength of prejudice, and the effects of *education*, as no man could have thought possible, had it not been proved by experience: For in fact it is to imagine that our worship is the more rational, the more we are strangers to the words and matter of our prayers, and the less access we have had to satisfy ourselves of the propriety of our petitions, and the more confidence we repose in another man: that our worship will be the more acceptable to the Deity, the less care and pains are taken about the words or matter of it, by the parson or the people; and that our prayers will be so much the sooner heard, the less chance they have to be expressed in proper words, or to consist of pious and reasonable petitions. We may sometimes have a better or a worse form, according to the judgment and capacity of the minister; but we must always have a very defective one; and our very best form must be as far inferior to a rational well-composed liturgy, as the learning, judgment, and memory

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of one man, are to the abilities and calm reflection of a number of the most learned and judicious men of the age. I must confess that I have often beheld, with indignation, the parson pulling out his papers for the sermon, when he trusted the prayer to his invention and memory: not that I have any prejudice against reading of sermons, or am not convinced that it is the best method, unless the minister be a man of extraordinary parts, of extensive learning, and blessed with a very good memory; but that I look upon it as an affront offered to God and the congregation, and very absurd in this instance; as it shows that the minister is less concerned about the propriety and decency of his address to his God, than to his people; that he is more afraid of a blunder in his sermon, than in his worship; or at least, that he thinks, either that a mistake in the last is of less consequence than in the first, or that it is an easier matter to pray than to preach well. I own that he has reason to believe that any thing *like* a prayer will pass with the bulk of the people, because in truth they do not regard it much; but this should never induce him to show that he is careless about the matter and words of their prayers as they are themselves, and that he takes more care and pains to please them by his sermons, than to offer their prayers in a concise and proper manner.

I have often heard the members of our Church, when the difficulties and dangers of our present way of worship have been fairly

laid before them, satisfy themselves by saying, that most of our ministers had a form of prayer which they used, and with which, by length of time, their people became very well acquainted. I believe it may be true, that most of them naturally fall into a form; but if we will believe themselves, (and they certainly know best,) it is rather by chance than by design, and of consequence more by good luck, than good management, or much care, if the form they fall into, be a good one. However, it is here granted, that the worshipping of God by a form is not only lawful and reasonable, but also necessary: and if this be the case, why should not our worship be rendered uniform, by an established general form of prayer? Why should it not be brought as near perfection as possible, by the judgment, piety, and learning of our ablest ministers, and other members of our Church, conferring together upon the subject? Why should not this form of prayer be communicated to the laity, that we may examine and approve of it? Is the parson's form such a secret, that we may not see and examine it for ourselves? Is it any advantage to our worship, that he may alter, curtail, or enlarge it, as his passions or prejudices chance to direct; and wrap into his form any whimsical opinion that he chances to embrace? We must, notwithstanding his form, go to the church with a trembling heart; as we know not but some minister may officiate, whose form of prayer we never have heard; our own minister may have changed his, or some unlucky and inde-

cent petition may be thrown in; as he has it in his power to do as he pleases.

At the same time it is true, that our ministers, who carefully compose and constantly use a form of prayer, do as much as they can, in their present circumstances, to render our worship pure and rational, and to assist the devotions of their people : and therefore deserve their esteem and thanks : but yet it is evident, that these private forms have no great chance of being so full and perfect, and that they have but few advantages of a general established form of prayer, and many of the disadvantages of the extemporary method.

It has been often urged in defence of extempore public prayers, that the apostles used that way of worship. If they did so, they did more than their Master either taught them, or gave them an example of, as far as we can judge. But supposing that it were proved, (which it has not yet been, and I doubt never will be) that the apostles used extemporary public prayer, I am afraid we shall not be able to infer from thence, that our ministers should pray extempore, or that the people should trust every one of them with the composition and direction of their public worship ; unless it could also be proved, that every one of them is directed by immediate inspiration. I have often blushed for our ministers when I have heard them urge this argument, as it is so weak and inconclusive in itself, and betrays so much presumption and self-sufficiency in them ; for in fact it is putting our present ministers upon a level with the apostles.

Some days ago, I was passing by Bedlam and observed one of its wretched inhabitants wrestling with a great iron gate. I asked him what he was about : he told me, with an air of importance that his name was Sampson, and that he meant to carry up that gate to the top of an opposite hill, as his namesake did the gates of Gaza. I did not stay to convince him that Sampson was endued with miraculous strength ; but I could not help thinking that there was a great resemblance in his way of reasoning, or rather running mad, to the argument in hand ; for the apostles were endued with miraculous gifts, as much superior to the abilities of our present ministers, as Sampson's strength was to that of the poor Bedlamite. They lived in an age, in which miraculous gifts, by the goodness of God, were common in the Church ; but in our time there is nothing miraculous, unless it be the self-sufficiency and presumption of the clergy, in taking upon them to offer an extemporary address to their Maker ; and each of them claiming a right to make a whole parish pray as he pleases ; and the absurd confidence reposed in them by the laity ; and the tame submission by which they suffer every man that chances to fill their pulpits, to manufacture and mix up their prayers as he chooses. These, indeed, are miraculous things, such as no age, no country, no religion, ever produced examples of ; and it is still more surprising, that the clergy themselves, (as I have proved before) see and publish to the world, that the people do not join in public worship ; and the most learned and sensible

part of the laity feel and acknowledge, that it is very difficult and dangerous for them to join in it, as it is performed at present; and yet that none of our clergy have compassion and humility to propose, nor any of the laity resolution to demand, a change; but that all of them sit down with an absurd and dangerous way of worship, introduced partly by necessity, and partly by enthusiasm, in the distracted days of our reformation; disapproved of by our ablest reformers from the beginning, as witness John Knox, who composed and used a form of prayer; and only approved of and supported by the silly, ignorant vulgar, who have so little knowledge, either of the nature or importance of prayer, that they would not give themselves the trouble to go to church, unless it were to hear a sermon; and by the turbulent and self-sufficient part of the clergy, who find that it gives them a fair opportunity to sow discord, propagate faction, and prostitute our worship to their foolish fondness for popularity.

That the mob, who place great merit in hearing many sermons, and think preaching the most important part of public worship, should be fond of our present method, is no wonder at all; for our extemporary effusions are rather sermons than prayers. It is natural, too, for the ambitious, enthusiastical, and libertine part of our clergy, to be warmly attached to our present way of worship: it most effectually answers their several purposes: it affords the ambitious a large field for displaying their popular talents, and an excellent opportunity to *preach themselves*: it gives enthusiasts and

libertines fair scope to vent their whimsical and pernicious principles. Indeed, nothing can be better calculated for propagating sedition, heresy, enthusiasm, and party principles, than our present way of worship : since every minister has the composition of most of it, and the choice and management of the whole : so that it is no wonder if men of these characters be fond of it; nay, it would be very surprising if they could be persuaded to give up our present method.

But it is not easy to conceive why the learned, orthodox, and pious part of our clergy, who have no other views but the good of souls, and the glory of God, have not endeavored to remedy these ills, by composing and authorizing such a form of prayer, as might enable every congregation in the kingdom to offer their prayers upon truly Christian principles : or how it comes to pass, that the sensible and pious part of our laity, (though they can hardly miss to see, that it is inconsistent with religion, and common sense, to trust the most solemn part of our worship to the discretion, honesty, and ability, often of strangers whom they have never seen before, and always of individuals, of whose weakness and folly they have many instances,) choose to run such a terrible risk.

I have contributed my poor mite to deliver the laity from the hardships and danger to which they are exposed by our present way of worship ; and (as I think) have made it obvious, that the present method is attended with great inconveniences and imminent danger to us poor laymen. I may likewise hope, that the rulers of

our Church will lay our case to heart, and take such methods as may enable us to offer a rational service to the great Source of reason, and to lift up holy hands, without perplexity, fear, or danger. While our case continues as it is, our churches may indeed be crowded by those who have not sense to see their danger, nor attention to perceive upon how many opposite principles they are made to pray; persons who have never, perhaps, in all their lives, reflected upon the nature and importance of prayer, and come to church partly because it is the custom, or at most to hear a sermon: but those who consider the nature and importance of public worship, will hardly choose, in a thing of so great consequence, to be blindfolded and led by the parson.

With all humility and due deference, I submit the whole to your consideration, more extensive learning, and better judgment, and to the candid reflection of all pious Christians; and am, with the greatest respect,

Reverend Fathers,

Your most obedient

And most humble servant,

A. T. BLACKSMITH.

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